

*The Invention of Deviance: How Wilhelmine Jews Became Opponents of Ennoblement**

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If the question comes to German Jewry and ennoblement, two aspects seem to be worth mentioning in particular. First of all there were a small number of ennoblements, such as that of the Berlin banker Gerson (von) Bleichröder, ennobled in 1872, which Fritz Stern, in his biography of Bismarck and Bleichröder, depicted as a great exception.¹ One other Prussian of Jewish belief had already received a patent of nobility in 1867: Abraham (Freiherr von) Oppenheim of Cologne.² Lastly, Maximilian (Freiherr von) Goldschmidt(-Rothschild) of Frankfurt am Main received his *von* in 1903 and was made a baron in 1907.³ Altogether, therefore, there were exactly three Jewish families who were ennobled in Prussia before and up to the end of the monarchy in 1918.

Second, one frequently reads of German-Jewish bankers and entrepreneurs who refused Prussian titles of nobility, for example “Rudolf Mosse [who] refused a patent of nobility, offered him by William II through the intermediary of a high official”.⁴ This was the case with the Berlin banker Moritz Plaut, who “refused to be raised to the nobility; decorations meant nothing to him”.⁵ And his colleague Rudolph Sulzbach of Frankfurt even refused the *Freiherrnstand* that was offered to him by William II.⁶ The same goes for Moritz Warburg, who “declined ennoblement so well; as did his son Max M. Warburg, who was recommended for an ennoblement,

*I would like to thank Professor Raphael Gross and Dr des. Daniel Wildmann for their helpful comments when presenting my thoughts at a workshop of the Leo Baeck Fellowship Programme in Prague, May 2008: All translations are by the author.

¹ Fritz Stern, *Gold and Iron: Bismarck, Bleichröder, and the Building of the German Empire*, New York 1977.

² At the same time King William I recognised his brother Simon's Austrian baronial title. See Wilhelm Treue, ‘Die Bankiers Simon und Abraham Oppenheim 1828–1880. Der private Hintergrund ihrer beruflichen Tätigkeit, ihre Rolle in der Politik und ihre Nobilitierung’, in *Zeitschrift für Unternehmensgeschichte*, vol. 31 (1986), pp. 31–72.

³ The baronial title was made to descend in the order of primogeniture. Exceptionally in 1911 Maximilian's eldest son Albert von Goldschmidt-Rothschild was allowed to bear the title of a baron during his father's lifetime.

⁴ Werner E. Mosse, ‘Rudolf Mosse and the House of Mosse 1867–1920’, in *LBI Year Book*, vol. 4 (1959), pp. 237–259, here p. 250, n. 34.

⁵ Walter Schwarz, ‘A Jewish Banker in the Nineteenth Century’, in: *LBI Year Book*, vol. 3 (1958), pp. 300–310, here p. 306.

⁶ Hans-Dieter Kirchholtes, *Jüdische Privatbanken in Frankfurt am Main*, 2nd edn., Frankfurt am Main 1989, p. 32.

but presumably declined to accept the decoration.⁷ There are several more examples.

But the cases mentioned most often are those of Albert Ballin and Carl Fürstenberg. Even the two most important accounts of German history of our times name them as opponents of ennoblement. As Thomas Nipperdey put it in 1990: "The Jewish upper bourgeoisie and the majority of the Jewish millionaires were particularly assimilated. They were, it is true, less 'feudalised' than non-Jewish members of their class. Ballin, Fürstenberg, and the Berlin newspaper czars for instance declined ennoblement; others, however, were more easily lured by titles of nobility."⁸ And five years later Hans-Ulrich Wehler wrote in his *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*: "Not infrequently even ennoblements which had been offered were self-confidently refused by affluent German entrepreneurs, among others by Carl Fürstenberg and Max Warburg, Albert Ballin, Emil Kirdorf and August Scherl, and others."⁹

This article argues that, concerning Jews, it is rather unlikely that there were any refusals of ennoblement: on the one hand, William II (or other decision-makers) certainly did not make such offers; on the other hand, it is hard to imagine that so many men, most of whom sought reputation as best as they could under the conditions of their times, should have been indifferent to monarchical titles. There seems to be an influential *topos* of (Jewish as well as non-Jewish) bourgeois opposition to decorations in Imperial Germany. Why, then, do we presume German Jews in particular to have been opposed to ennoblement at the turn of the century? To approach this question, it is necessary to submit the relevant sources and literature to a critical re-evaluation. The article, therefore, sheds light on five aspects: firstly, the actual accessibility of Prussian titles of nobility for confessing Jews; secondly, rumours in Wilhelmine Germany itself; thirdly, statements by prominent German Jews during the Weimar Republic; fourthly, statements by relatives of such Jews from after 1945, and, finally, the picture drawn by historians during the last decades.

ADMISSION UNDESIRABLE: THE EXCLUSION OF JEWS FROM TITLES OF NOBILITY

German- or Prussian-Jewish opposition to ennoblement would have been a great exception in nineteenth-century Europe.¹⁰ As the German-speaking supporters of

⁷ Hans-Konrad Stein, *Der preußische Geldadel des 19. Jahrhunderts. Untersuchungen zur Nobilitierungspolitik der preußischen Regierung und zur Anpassung der oberen Schichten des Bürgertums an den Adel*, doctoral thesis (University of Hamburg), 2 vols., 1982, vol. 1, p. 61. Translated here by the author. All translations from German are by the author.

⁸ Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1866–1918*, 2 vols., Munich 1990–1992, vol. 1 (1990): *Arbeitswelt und Bürgergeist*, p. 406.

⁹ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, 5 vols., Munich 1987–2008, vol. 3 (1995): *Von der "Deutschen Doppelrevolution" bis zum Beginn des Ersten Weltkrieges 1849–1914*, p. 719.

¹⁰ See only William O. McCagg, 'Austria's Jewish Nobles, 1740–1918', in *LBI Year Book*, vol. 34 (1989), pp. 163–183.

the Alliance Israélite Universelle could read in its journal *Ost und West* in 1912, “[t]here are Jewish nobles everywhere where Jews live, even in Russia” but “only in England is there a Jewish nobility as a special Jewish class”.¹¹ Even the Paris of the Third Republic saw Jewish bankers striving for ennoblement, but, of necessity, receiving titles from abroad. Why, then, should German-Jewish bankers, especially the more prominent ones—tied in many ways to Jews in other countries by business, relationship, or marriage—, have been so much more modest than their relatives and business partners in other European countries?

This is not the place to give a detailed analysis of the Prussian ennoblement policy concerning Jews and to discuss how antisemitic William II was.¹² Suffice it to clarify the characteristics of importance for our topic. It is no wonder that not one file or reliable source has been found so far informing us about unsuccessful plans of William II to bestow titles of nobility on prominent Jewish businessmen, for, from all we know, it is most unlikely that there ever were such monarchical offers, let alone refusals by Jews. On the contrary, businessmen who did receive a title of nobility had generally applied for it themselves—just like in the rest of Europe. Furthermore, the Prussian office of nobility affairs, the *Heroldamt*, was careful not to raise too many members of the bourgeoisie to the ranks of the nobility, its function being to maintain the exclusiveness of the Prussian nobility. If, therefore, the number of ennobled Prussian families from the upper bourgeoisie is rather low, this is certainly not due to the unattractiveness of titles to prospective nobles, but rather to the successful policy of members of the old nobility who still dominated the civil service.¹³

It was Jewish merchants in particular against whom the decisive circles were most prejudiced, even if they were baptised. A further case in point was the appointment of members to the Prussian Upper House¹⁴—a procedure similar to ennoblement in many ways. Finally, from about 1880 until 1914, Jews, as is well known, were systematically excluded from the Prussian officer corps.¹⁵ All in all, then, it is quite astonishing that scholars still believe it to have been relatively easy for unbaptised Jews to be ennobled by the Prussian state at the turn of the century. The files of the *Heroldamt*, one of the most decisive authorities in the process of ennoblement, leave little doubt about the fact that its members had strong prejudices against Jews,

¹¹ Anon, ‘Der juedische Adel in England’, in *Ost und West*, vol. 12 (1912), cols. 365–374, here col. 365.

¹² The relevant literature for the latter question is discussed by Christopher Clark, *Wilhelm II. Die Herrschaft des letzten deutschen Kaisers*, Munich 2008 (enlarged translation of his *Kaiser Wilhelm II*, Harlow 2000), pp. 325–332 (with the wrong information on p. 327 that William II ennobled seven confessing Jews).

¹³ Hartwin Spenkuch, *Das Preußische Herrenhaus. Adel und Bürgertum in der Ersten Kammer des Landtages 1854–1918*, Düsseldorf 1998 (Beiträge zur Geschichte des Parlamentarismus und der politischen Parteien 110), p. 452.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 426.

¹⁵ See e.g. Werner T. Angress, ‘Prussia’s Army and the Jewish Reserve Officer Controversy before World War I’, in *LBI Year Book*, vol. 17 (1972), pp. 19–42; and Manfred Messerschmidt, ‘Juden im preußisch-deutschen Heer’, in *Deutsche Jüdische Soldaten. Von der Epoche der Emancipation bis zum Zeitalter der Weltkriege*, ed. by the Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, Potsdam 1996, pp. 39–62.

as was also the case within the council of ministers.¹⁶ When Maximilian Goldschmidt, the son-in-law of the last Frankfurt Rothschild, applied for a title in 1902 the minister of the interior was explicitly told that the *Heroldsamt* found it “generally undesirable to admit non-Christians to the Prussian nobility”¹⁷.

Some converts, on the other hand, were granted titles, for example Georg (von) Caro (1906), Fritz (von) Friedlaender(-Fuld) (1906), and Paul (von) Schwabach (1907). Apparently racial antisemitism, generally increasing in this period, was not predominant in the ranks of the bureaucracy. And in one case known to us the monarch asserted himself against the prevailing attitude in the cabinet. When the Prussian ministers discussed the question of the Goldschmidt-Rothschild barony in 1906, attention was drawn to the fact that the monarch “knew well that the recent ennoblements of persons of Jewish descent were not endorsed everywhere”¹⁸. William, however, deliberately chose to disregard public as well as ministerial opinion in his decision to make a baron Goldschmidt-Rothschild. Instead, the ministers were informed that William II “has generally expressed a strong interest in the matter” and wanted an acceleration of the procedure.¹⁹

This one royal intervention notwithstanding, it is obvious that confessing Jews were not usually welcomed with enthusiasm into the Prussian nobility, either by the monarch or by the *Heroldsamt*. On the contrary, it seems to have been the case that a conversion (to Protestantism) could be one action rewarded by an ennoblement.²⁰ In general William II would have had the opportunity to decorate more Jews, or to encourage their applications. It was certainly no coincidence that Goldschmidt remained the only confessing Jew ennobled by him—although we do have to acknowledge that in 1913 Eduard Arnhold became the only member of the Prussian Upper House who, at least officially, was a member of the Jewish community. The appointment, which had been suggested by the minister of trade, was delayed twice and took one and a half years to be made. Apparently the majority of the ministers (who were astonished that Arnhold was “still a Jew”) had feared antisemitic agitations before the elections of 1912.²¹

One can only speculate whether if little by little the antisemitism dominant in government circles would have decreased, had the monarchy continued to exist.

¹⁶ Dieter Hertz-Eichenrode, ‘Wilhelminischer Neuadel? Zur Praxis der Adelsverleihung in Preußen vor 1914’, in *Historische Zeitschrift*, vol. 282 (2006), pp. 645–679, here pp. 671 and 675f.

¹⁷ Report of the *Heroldsamt* for the Prussian minister of the interior (via the minister of the Royal House), Berlin, 7 March 1902. Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz [GStA PK], I. HA, Rep. 176, VI G Nr. 277, fol. 5v, also cited in Hertz-Eichenrode, ‘Wilhelminischer Neuadel?’, p. 671.

¹⁸ Minutes of the session of the *Königliches Staatsministerium* in Berlin, 22 June 1906. GStA PK, I. HA, Rep. 90 A, 3609, fol. 322r.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, fol. 318v.

²⁰ Hertz-Eichenrode, ‘Wilhelminischer Neuadel?’, p. 671, wrongly speaks of the Frankfurt industrialist Friedrich Gans who was ennobled in 1912 as a confessing Jew: like his nephews Arthur and Carl (von) Weinberg, Gans had become a Protestant. See Angela von Gans and Monika Groening, *Die Familie Gans 1350–1963. Ursprung und Schicksal einer wiederentdeckten Gelehrten- und Wirtschaftsdynastie*, Heidelberg 2006, p. 157.

²¹ Spenckuch, p. 398 with n. 34; Martin Dorrmann, *Eduard Arnhold (1849–1925). Eine biographische Studie zu Unternehmer- und Mäzenatentum im Deutschen Kaiserreich*, Berlin 2002, pp. 87–89.

In any case, it must have been common knowledge in *fin de siècle* Prussia that it was virtually impossible for Prussians of the Jewish faith to ascend to the officer corps, or high posts in the civil service or nobility. It cannot be discussed in detail how far this situation may have affected the appeal of certain monarchical decorations as far as Jews were concerned. At least some non-Jewish industrialists such as August Thyssen and Hugo Stinnes were clearly not in favour of monarchical decorations.²² And the ancient and proud *Hansestadt* Hamburg certainly forms an exception. Several Jewish businessmen, however, sought titles no less than their Christian colleagues and competitors did.

THINKING THE UNTHINKABLE: RUMOURS ABOUT IMMINENT ENNOBLEMENTS IN THE EARLY 1900S

Around 1905 rumours were circulating that there existed serious plans to enoble prominent Jews or to make them ministers or members of the Upper House. Two foreign journalists made Albert Ballin, the famous director general of the Hamburg-America Line, appear to be a particular opponent of such honours and titles that he had allegedly been offered. In 1908 Jules Huret claimed that not long before William II had offered Ballin a title of nobility but that the latter had replied that he was not interested. Likewise he claimed that Ballin refused to become a minister, not wanting to be baptised for opportunistic reasons only.²³ And five years later Frederic Wile even wrote that Ballin had resisted "multiple unsuccessful attempts" to make him a minister or to bestow on him the *von*. Significantly, Wile approves of this, pointing out at the same time that "the average German" would do anything to be ennobled or to bear titles such as excellency, secretary of state, *Geheimrat*, "or similarly lengthy attachments".²⁴ Wile's text, which certainly refers to that of Huret, shows how influential a rumour may become: both books are the sources Nipperdey, Wehler, and all others eventually refer to, although mostly indirectly.

When the Frankfurt banker and philanthropist Charles Hallgarten (a Jew and a US citizen) died in 1908, some newspapers wrote that, in all likelihood, William II would have naturalised him and appointed him to the Upper House had he lived longer.²⁵ In reality, Hallgarten would never have been appointed to the Upper House, both because of both his citizenship (which he would not have wanted to

²² Gerald D. Feldman, *Hugo Stinnes. Biographie eines Industriellen 1870–1924*, Munich 1998, p. 342; Manfred Rasch, *August Thyssen: Der katholische Großindustrielle der Wilhelminischen Epoche*, in *idem* and Gerald D. Feldman (eds.), *August Thyssen und Hugo Stinnes. Ein Briefwechsel 1898–1922*, Munich 2003 (Schriftenreihe zur Zeitschrift für Unternehmensgeschichte 10), pp. 13–107, here p. 102 and *passim*.

²³ Jules Huret, In *Deutschland*, 4 vols., Leipzig—Berlin—Vienna 1907/1910, vol. 2 (1908): *Von Hamburg bis zu den polnischen Ostmarken*, pp. 181f.

²⁴ Frederic William Wile, *Rings um den Kaiser*, Berlin 1913, pp. 19f.

²⁵ Jacob Tourny, *Die politischen Orientierungen der Juden in Deutschland. Von Jena bis Weimar*, Tübingen 1966 (Schriftenreihe wissenschaftlicher Abhandlungen des Leo Baeck Instituts 15), p. 240; Arno Lustiger, *Charles Hallgarten's reichsdeutsche und internationale Aktivitäten*, in *idem* (ed.), *Charles Hallgarten. Leben und Wirken des Frankfurter Sozialreformers und Philanthropen*, Frankfurt am Main 2003, pp. 127–144, here pp. 142f.

relinquish) and his confession (which was of less importance to him, although he supported Jewish institutions likewise and would never have converted). Interestingly enough, we already find similar rumours in 1904 when the *General-Anzeiger für die gesamten Interessen des Judentums* and the social-democratic *Vorwärts* reported that the Jew James Simon of Berlin was designated to be appointed to the Prussian Upper House, viewed this as the beginning of a new era.²⁶ And as early as 1902 the *Israelitisches Familienblatt* named Ludwig Max Goldberger, a director of the Dresden Bank, as a Jewish candidate for the Upper House.²⁷ Actually Goldberger himself had unsuccessfully tried to become a member in 1898, as had the Berlin Jewish banker Jacob Landau in 1876.²⁸ As for Simon and Hallgarten, however, the rumours were totally unfounded.²⁹ What they may reflect instead are the hopes of German-Jewish journalists.

From about 1906 Walther Rathenau actively sought a political office, aspiring to the position of an Imperial secretary of state or an ambassador. But Chancellor von Bülow, although he genuinely appreciated Rathenau, did not appoint him, apparently fearing antisemitic opposition. Instead, Rathenau obtained decorations such as the Order of the Red Eagle Second Class in 1910, which both Bülow and he considered as an encouragement.³⁰ Only after First World War did Rathenau become foreign minister. After his assassination by rightist terrorists in 1922, his private secretary Hugo Geitner claimed in an obituary that Rathenau had rejected an official title fifteen years earlier, as well as the position of secretary of state which he had been offered at the outbreak of the war.³¹ Both assertions are groundless, portraying Rathenau as much more modest than he seems to have been. Clearly, Geitner's text is infused by the spirit of the 1920s, a democratic era, in which one was eager to retrospectively demonstrate one's pre-war distance from the values of monarchy.

TITLES UNDESIRABLE: OPPOSING WILLIAM II IN RETROSPECT

Although during the revolution of 1918–1919 and afterwards Eduard Arnhold and Herbert Gutmann aided the Hohenzollern family,³²—both Arnhold and

²⁶ Tourny, p. 240; Olaf Matthes, *James Simon. Mäzen im Wilhelminischen Zeitalter*, Berlin 2000 (Bürgerlichkeit, Wertewandel, Mäzenatentum 5), p. 74.

²⁷ Tourny, p. 240.

²⁸ Spenkuch, pp. 426–428. In 1881 Landau received a baronial title by the Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha which was not recognised in Prussia. Klaus Freiherr von Andrian-Werburg, 'Die Nobilitierung preußischer Untertanen in Sachsen-Coburg und Gotha', in *Archivalische Zeitschrift*, vol. 75 (1979), pp. 1–15, here p. 10.

²⁹ For a list of business candidates for the Upper House who did not succeed see Spenkuch, pp. 420–424.

³⁰ Gerhard Hecker, *Walther Rathenau und sein Verhältnis zu Militär und Krieg*, Boppard 1983 (Militärgeschichtliche Studien 30), pp. 257–261; Christian Schölzel, *Walther Rathenau. Eine Biographie*, Paderborn 2006, pp. 75–78.

³¹ Hecker, p. 261, who rightly doubts Geitner's version.

³² Dörrmann, pp. 91 and 231; Vivian J. Rheinheimer, *Behaltet mich in guter Erinnerung. Herbert M. Gutmann—eine Lebensbeschreibung*, in *idem* (ed.), *Herbert M. Gutmann. Bankier in Berlin, Bauherr in Potsdam, Kunstsammler*, Leipzig 2007, pp. 9–34, here p. 23.

Gutmann's father, Eugen, the head of the Dresdner Bank, were later said to have been opponents of ennoblement. But when in 1928, three years after Arnhold's death, his widow published a *Gedenkbuch* for relatives, friends, and acquaintances, she did not mention that her husband had been offered a patent of nobility (nor the Jewish religion of the family) at all. On the contrary she proudly exposed the blessed wealth of decorations ("Ordenssegen") the monarchist Arnhold had enjoyed, receiving "high Prussian orders" such as the Order of the Red Eagle Second Class, the *Wilhelmsorden*, and the Iron Cross (for his economic merits during the war).³³ His appointment to the Upper House in 1913 is described as "a particularly high decoration during the old régime, well, perhaps the highest that it could award at all".³⁴

Today, these confessions of the widow of the "kingly merchant"³⁵ Eduard Arnhold, made ten years after the end of the monarchy, are no longer remembered. Memoirs of wealthy Jews from the 1920s that claim rather strong anti-monarchist feelings, on the other hand, are still quite influential. During the Weimar Republic, then, it became popular to present oneself as a self-confident member of the middle class, not aspiring to decorations. To understand this, one must bear in mind the dramatic loss of esteem the Hohenzollern monarchy underwent particularly during the war, as well as the criticism of the upper-middle class focusing on their alleged greed for titles, estates, and marriages with noble families instead of political participation. Remember that Wile, in his book on Germany's leaders from 1913, mentions Albert Ballin with his alleged modesty concerning titles as a laudable exception. In the early 1900s, then, there seems to have been an influential discourse on the alleged process of feudalisation of the German upper-middle class—an expression already used by contemporaries such as Walther Rathenau, Werner Sombart, and Max Weber. These accusations did not die down after 1918. In his *Das Geld in der Politik* (1930), Richard Lewinsohn, the leading economic editor of the liberal *Vossische Zeitung*, strongly criticised bankers and industrialists who, particularly under in the reign of William II, had sought titles of nobility and other decorations instead of trying to eliminate the régime of the old nobility.³⁶

For similar reasons, alleged or actual anti-monarchism was highly esteemed in certain circles during the Weimar Republic. In 1920 Binjamin Segel, who was a strong critic of what he perceived as Jewish "parvenuism",³⁷ commended the deceased Rudolf Mosse in *Ost und West*: according to Segel, Mosse had been an impressive and independent self-made man, the opposite of the typical "*Untertan*" of the Wilhelmine era. What is more, Mosse "never courted the favour of the powerful,

³³ [Johanna Arnhold and Adolf Grabowsky], *Eduard Arnhold. Ein Gedenkbuch*, Berlin 1928, pp. 45 and 64. On the *Gedenkbuch* cf. Dorrmann, pp. 11f.

³⁴ Arnhold and Grabowsky, p. 58.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 10f.

³⁶ Richard Lewinsohn, *Das Geld in der Politik*, Berlin 1930, pp. 18–20 and *passim*.

³⁷ David A. Brenner, *Marketing Identities: The Invention of Jewish Ethnicity in Ost und West*, Detroit 1998, *passim*.

or that of the masses, nor did he strive for an order or a title of nobility".³⁸ But during the reign of William II it was doubtlessly inconceivable that the editor of the liberal *Berliner Tageblatt* could have been ennobled.

Like Wile's comment on Albert Ballin in 1913, Mosse's obituary by Segel seems to vent the feeling that, regrettably, most members of the middle class in Wilhelmine Germany had been seeking decorations and titles; Mosse, however, is presented as an exception of the rule. Such allegations of modesty can be found in at least three similar cases in the early 1930s, made by either prominent Jewish businessmen themselves or their sons. And still we get the impression that reproaches played a role then this is the case in CF's memoirs, which were published in 1931, two years before the death of the Berlin banker, and which had actually been written by his son Hans:

In pre-war times, I was almost suspected of trying to be exceptional at all costs on account of my indifference towards any kind of title. I, however, do not feel the least guilty for that, having never desired to attach a predicate to my name. I remember that even such a serious man as Emil Rathenau once reproached me with my negative attitude. . . . In Imperial Germany, one was quite simply expected to show gratitude on receiving an order. Had one dared to decline it that would have been considered highly offensive. Still, the Prussian finance minister, Scholz, honoured me by promoting me to a higher class than lawful when I was decorated for the first time. One decorated with an order had the right to wear it or leave it, just as he pleased. With regard to titles, however—if I may quote myself—there is no amnesty in Germany. Thus the joys of the title of *Geheimrat* passed me by, just like the entry into the ranks of the nobility, which an overly zealous eager acquaintance of mine once suggested to me.³⁹

And concerning Fürstenberg's relationship with William II we get to know:

I do not wish to give the impression that I met the emperor and his inner circle more frequently. . . . I often wondered why the emperor just gave me the honour of such friendly treatment, and I would like to believe [*rede mir ein*] to have found the answer to that question. The emperor knew how completely indifferent I was towards the decorations he was able to bestow—not only outwardly, but also inwardly.⁴⁰

According to Fürstenberg, the emperor is even reported to have said: ". . . 'I am sure that he does not want anything from me, and he shall not believe, that I want anything from him' . . ."⁴¹ Carl—or Hans—Fürstenberg then concludes that, for the monarch, "[t]he eternal hunt for orders, decorations, titles, predicates of nobility, and advancements, which was predominant in the environment of the emperor, well, within a great part of Germany's upper class, . . . in the long run [had to be] harmful for a man of his character".⁴²

³⁸ B. Saphra (*i.e.* Benjamin Segel), 'Rudolf Mosse', in *Ost und West*, vol. 20 (1920), cols. 242–245, here col. 242.

³⁹ Carl Fürstenberg, *Die Lebensgeschichte eines deutschen Bankiers 1870–1914*, ed. by Hans Fürstenberg, Berlin 1931, pp. 198f.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 441.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 442.

⁴² *ibid.*

A statement by James Simon in the same year shows certain parallels to Fürstenberg's views. Simon told his friend, the journalist Ernst Feder, several anecdotes from his life, which Feder noted down in his diary, for instance: "As he [i.e. Simon] was told by Admiral Hollmann the emperor said to [Chancellor] Bülow: 'Do you know J. Simon? That man does not want any order or decoration; everything he does he does just because of the matter.'"⁴³ The similarity to the anecdote in Carl Fürstenberg's memoir which was published in the same year is striking. Six months earlier Simon had already strongly criticised another prominent Jewish industrialist with access to the monarch. As Feder writes: "[I]n the afternoon to James Simon, who lies in bed. Narrates . . . [how] in an importunate way Walther Rathenau curried the emperor's favour, which did not meet with his approval."⁴⁴ And in 1927 Simon had told Feder: "Politically the emperor was unapproachable, even for Ballin, whom the emperor had unsuccessfully offered a title of nobility."⁴⁵ Again, one is struck by the success of a rumour. Perhaps even James Simon had come to the conviction that there had been such an offer by William II. The reader of Feder's diary, in any case, is left with the impression that Simon tried to present himself as a self-confident and self-sufficient man of the middle class—even right next to the throne.

Before the war, James Simon's relations with the *Kaiser* had been quite close—which may be the reason why in 1902 some newspapers voiced the opinion that he was to become a member of the Upper House. Indeed, in 1899 Simon had rejected the title of commercial councillor, according to the contemporary records of the Berlin police department, stating that this would disagree with his disposition.⁴⁶ On the other hand, he had collected several orders such as the *Wilhelmsorden* (1904), the Order of the Crown Second Class (1908), and the Order of the Red Eagle Second Class with Crown (1914) since the 1890s.⁴⁷ What is more, at least once Simon considered a personal decoration as a symbol for the milieus he belonged to. In 1896 he wrote to Wilhelm von Bode that, considering the small number of merchants, Jews, and Liberals decorated these days, it would be a satisfaction for the "upper regions" of the *Tiergartenviertel* "if I were honoured with a higher decoration".⁴⁸ Thirty-five years later—shortly before his death in 1932, however, James Simon presented his behaviour under the monarchy as rather self-confident, telling Ernst Feder much of his—undisputed—efforts for Jewish matters. Presumably Simon also liked (or had he even personally inspired?) the version some newspapers supplied on the occasion of his eightieth birthday in 1931. According to

⁴³ Diary entry of Feder from 8 March 1931. Ernst Feder, *Heute sprach ich mit . . . Tagebücher eines Berliner Publizisten 1926–1932*, ed. by Cécile Lowenthal-Hensel and Arnold Paucker, Stuttgart 1971 (Veröffentlichung des Leo Baeck Instituts), p. 287.

⁴⁴ Diary entry of Feder from 14 September 1930. *ibid.*, p. 267.

⁴⁵ Diary entry of Feder from 1 May 1927. *ibid.*, p. 123.

⁴⁶ Matthes, p. 75.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 74–76. Matthes stresses that Simon did not absolutely decline decorations, as had been supposed before.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 76.

these articles—and only to them—he himself had abandoned a seat in the Upper House due to the indignation of leading circles.⁴⁹

There is a third example from the very year 1931 which claims modesty for a Berlin Jewish businessman. Georg Solmssen, a managing director of the Deutsche Bank (who had converted and changed his surname long before), wrote in a privately published brochure about his father, the Berlin banker Adolph Salomonsohn: “Titles, orders, and decorations meant nothing to him [*waren für ihn Schall und Rauch*]. . . . He hated all byzantinism. He never crawled, always preserving his inner freedom and independence.”⁵⁰ It is revealing that Solmssen uses the word “byzantinism”, which in the early 1900s had become a widespread invective for the court of William II. It appears that Carl and/or Hans Fürstenberg, James Simon, and Georg Solmssen felt a certain necessity to distance themselves from the Imperial era.

Seemingly Carl Fürstenberg and Adolph Salomonsohn—but certainly not James Simon—had in fact belonged to those who were less in favour of governmental and monarchical decorations even before 1918. Nonetheless, both men were not altogether averse to seeking German or foreign orders, just as the majority of bankers in Imperial Germany they doubtlessly accepted the hierarchies and symbols of their times.⁵¹ Contemporary research on the reign of William II, therefore, seems to be much influenced by statements like those in the Fürstenberg memoirs against titles and orders. But how representative is this view, for the *Kaiserreich* as well as for the Weimar Republic? Again, it is important to emphasise that in turn-of-the-century Prussia certain positions and ranks, especially titles of nobility, were *de facto* out of the question for Jews. Refusal would not have been an option for them, as they would never have been offered such titles or positions in the first place. To assert, therefore, that Carl Fürstenberg and Adolph Salomonsohn “refused titles of nobility”, referring to the very sources presented above, as Dolores Augustine does, is untenable.⁵²

THE LIMITS OF FAMILY MEMORY: REMEMBRANCE LITERATURE AFTER THE HOLOCAUST

In 1949 the memoirs of the journalist Gustav Mayer, written during his exile in London, were published posthumously. Mayer reports that, when working as a correspondent of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in Hamburg from 1904 to 1906, the banker

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 74 (with reference to the *B.Z. am Mittag* from 15 and the *Textil-Zeitung* from 16 September 1931).

⁵⁰ Georg Solmssen, *Gedenkblatt für Adolf und Sara Salomonsohn zum 19. März 1931*, Berlin 1931, p. 20.

⁵¹ Morten Reitmayer, *Bankiers im Kaiserreich. Sozialprofil und Habitus der deutschen Hochfinanz*, Göttingen 1999 (Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft 136), pp. 73–76. According to Hans Fürstenberg his father, Carl, although not wanting any titles, did not refuse orders and decorations at all and used to wear both Prussian and foreign ones, e.g. the Austrian Order of Francis Joseph. Hans Fürstenberg, *Erinnerungen. Mein Weg als Bankier und Carl Fürstenbergs Altersjahre*, Wiesbaden 1965, p. 7.

⁵² Dolores L. Augustine, ‘The banker in German society, 1890–1930’, in Youssef Cassis (ed.), *Finance and Financiers in European History, 1880–1960*, Cambridge 1992, pp. 161–185, here p. 164.

Moritz (not his son Max) Warburg had once told him of a title of nobility which he had been offered but refused. The passage is worth citing completely:

I have already drawn attention to the tendency to feudalisation which, under William II, spread within the upper classes of the bourgeoisie and by which even the circles of scholars were affected. Neither did the pride of the Hanseatic 'royal' merchants resist such temptations from 'Prussian Berlin' in all cases. Johann Goßler, for instance, successfully sought ennoblement in 1889 and later even became a Prussian baron, whereas Moritz Warburg, senior head of M. M. Warburg und Co., refused a Prussian hereditary title of nobility which he could have bought by rehabilitating a well-known old Prussian noble family with three million marks. 'I preferred keeping my kosher three millions to myself', Moritz Warburg said with a smile when he told me this story.⁵³

Again, this is the only source that mentions the refusal in question.⁵⁴ For certain reasons, however, the Warburgs in Hamburg have become particularly popular recusants of ennoblement since. Would Moritz Warburg, an orthodox Jew, have been likely to receive such an offer from Berlin? Certainly not. And it is also rather unlikely that he himself as a Jew in the proud republic of Hamburg ever strove for a title of nobility as did some Christian bankers there.

In the same year Mayer's memoirs were published, Chaim Weizmann, first president of Israel, used the pejorative word "*Kaiserjuden*" for James Simon, Albert Ballin, Max M. Warburg *et al.*, accusing them of having been servile to William II, nay, "more German than the Germans, obsequious, superpatriotic, eagerly anticipating the wishes and plans of the masters of Germany".⁵⁵ Accusations like this may have been a decisive reason why after the Second World War some relatives of formerly leading Jewish businessmen took such pains to emphasise that their prominent ancestors had no close relations to the odious emperor.

In articles from the 1950s and 1960s, one comes across striking similarities in wording. Walter Schwarz, a Jewish remigrant and the attorney of Moritz Plaut's descendants, wrote in 1958 about Plaut: "The honours mounted. He refused to be raised to the nobility; decorations meant nothing to him. In the *Almanach der Guten Gesellschaft Deutschlands* of 1893/94 he appears as the holder of the Crown Order IVth class; it was just about the lowest decoration."⁵⁶ One year later Werner Mosse wrote that his great-uncle "Rudolf Mosse refused a patent of nobility, offered him by William II through the intermediary of a high official (recollection of his daughter and of his son-in-law). The only honour he was willing to accept from the Hohenzollern was the *Wilhelmsorden* bestowed on his wife for her social services. He was, however, ready to accept civic dignities including honorary citizenship of his native Grätz. Streets were named after him in Posen and Berlin".⁵⁷ The story of

⁵³ Gustav Mayer, *Erinnerungen. Vom Journalisten zum Historiker der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, Hildesheim—Zurich—New York 1993, p. 151 (first publication: Zurich—Vienna 1949).

⁵⁴ Ron Chernow does not mention it in his *The Warburgs: The Twentieth-Century Odyssey of a Remarkable Jewish Family*, New York 1993.

⁵⁵ Chaim Weizmann, *Trial and Error: The Autobiography*, New York 1966, p. 143 (first publication: *ibid.* 1949).

⁵⁶ Schwarz, p. 306.

⁵⁷ Mosse, 'Rudolf Mosse and the House of Mosse 1867–1920', p. 250, n. 34.

a rejected title of nobility had been reported by Werner Mosse's second cousin, the historian George Mosse.⁵⁸ And in a posthumously published article by Ernst Feder (1965), the most beautiful anecdotes about James Simon, praising his modesty during the Imperial era, were repeated. Amazingly we read: "The only imperial honour he did accept was the Order of William II . . . This was a personal tribute which Simon, of course, could not refuse . . . Only one title he accepted with pride: that was the Honorary Doctorate of Berlin University."⁵⁹ The first sentence is almost the same as in Mosse's article six years before so one may think it had been reused.⁶⁰ What all these articles have in common is the allegation that in Imperial Germany various orders and titles were easily accessible by wealthy Jews—who had good reasons to refuse them, and so they did. The frequently used word "accepted" is revealing as it implies a self-confident act, whereas on the contrary under the monarchy Jews had to endure a lack of acceptance—not least on the part of the emperor.

Similar stories were told in other Jewish families. In an anniversary publication from 1956 the Frankfurt banker Rudolph Sulzbach was said to have "politely refused a title of nobility, which had been offered to him, and other titles as expressions of royal favour. He wore the orders bestowed on him, which he was unable to refuse, only on rare occasions".⁶¹ Sulzbach's great-grandson Hans-Dieter Kirchholtes, heir to the family bank, wrote in 1969 even more concretely: "When he . . . was offered a title of nobility or a barony, respectively, by Emperor William II, he refused the popular decoration with his typical modesty."⁶² The source of the alleged offer (by word of mouth) was Herbert Sulzbach, a grandson of Rudolph and a cousin of Kirchholtes' mother, who had fled to London where he lived until his death in 1985.⁶³

⁵⁸ In a letter of 1 January 1959 George Mosse makes remarks on his cousin's manuscript of the article on Rudolf Mosse. Elisabeth Kraus, *Die Familie Mosse. Deutsch-jüdisches Bürgertum im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Munich 1999, p. 635, n. 59. He tells Werner that his mother had collected papers about this case and his father had mentioned it, too. The offer, George asserts, was communicated by a certain "Exzellenz von Horvath". Not surprisingly there are no papers in the collections of George Mosse and the Mosse family in the LBI New York (which holds the letter from 1959), *ibid.*, p. 639, n. 112. Cf. also George's autobiography: "Rudolf Mosse . . . , in keeping with his democratic convictions, had refused all imperial decorations or titles." George L. Mosse, *Confronting History: A Memoir*, Madison, WI 2000, p. 25. Needless to say, a Berlin high official named von Horvath cannot be found.

⁵⁹ [Ernst Feder], James Simon. Industrialist, Art Collector, Philanthropist', ed. by Robert Weltsch, in *LBI Year Book*, vol. 10 (1965), pp. 3–23, here p. 7.

⁶⁰ Robert Weltsch points out that he had added "other material from various sources" to Feder's article. *ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶¹ Franz Lerner, *Bestand im Wandel, dargestan an der hundertjährigen Geschichte des Frankfurter Privatbankhauses Heinrich Kirchholtes & Co. vorm. Gebrüder Sulzbach 1856–1956*, Frankfurt am Main 1956, p. 134.

⁶² Kirchholtes, p. 32 (likewise in the first edn. from 1969, p. 31).

⁶³ Kindly informed by Hans-Dieter Kirchholtes, Frankfurt am Main, 20 May 2008. On Herbert Sulzbach see Terence Prittie, 'Herbert Sulzbach: A Memoir', in Herbert Sulzbach, *With the German Guns: Four Years on the Western Front, 1914–1918*, London 1973 (republished translation of his *Zwei lebende Mauern. 50 Monate Westfront*, Berlin 1935), pp. 9–16. About his grandfather Rudolph Sulzbach it is once more said there: "He was offered a title of nobility by Kaiser Wilhelm II, but refused it." *ibid.*, p. 10.

Even in 1991 Bernard Goodman (whose parents had been killed in Theresienstadt and Auschwitz) wrote that his grandfather Eugen Gutmann, “who meanwhile had become a ‘Geheimer Kommerzienrat’ because of his merits of the German economy, nonetheless declined the title of a ‘baron’ which the emperor had offered him.”⁶⁴ By then several historians had already adopted stories of refusals, and it should not be underestimated that Werner Mosse was both a member of a prominent German-Jewish business family and a major historian of German Jewry.

HISTORIANS ON THE WRONG TRACK: THE TOPOS OF REJECTION AND ITS SUCCESS

As indicated by the quotation from Gustav Mayer’s memoirs, the question of feudalisation was still discussed after 1945, advancing, of course, to be the predominant idea of the German Imperial middle class, embraced by notable historians.⁶⁵ The feudalisation thesis and its temporary success must, of course, be seen within the context of the great debate about a German “*Sonderweg*” which was said to have led into the catastrophes of the twentieth century.⁶⁶ The German bourgeoisie of the early 1900s was accused of having been state-oriented instead of demanding political reforms, and the fact that businessmen had acquired titles of nobility seemed to support this thesis.

As a consequence, the concept of feudalisation formed the blueprint for studies about Jewish members of the German upper bourgeoisie. One good example of this is Lamar Cecil’s article on *Jew and Junker in Imperial Berlin*, which was published in 1975. Here, the author regrets that many prominent German-Jewish businessmen “were manifestly eager for social preferment”, “played the social game according to Junker rules” and “found noble society a prize worth pursuing”.⁶⁷ Likewise some years later Arthur Prinz argued that, at the turn of the century, “many of the rich Jews” in Germany completely sacrificed both their Jewishness and their “old bourgeois pride” just “to receive decorations such as titles, orders, or even an ennoblement by the government”.⁶⁸ With respect to the feudalisation thesis, Prinz explicitly refers to previous studies by Hans-Ulrich Wehler, as William McCagg had done in 1972 in a book and an article about Hungary’s Jewish nobility.⁶⁹ So the

⁶⁴ Bernard E. Goodman, *Eugen Gutmann und seine Familie. Ein Enkel erzählt*, Tübingen 1991 (unpublished typescript in the Historical Archive of the Dresdner Bank, Frankfurt am Main), p. 3.

⁶⁵ A good overview is given by Dieter Hertz-Eichenrode, ‘Die Feudalisierungsthese—ein Rückblick’, in *Vierteljahrsschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, vol. 89 (2002), pp. 265–287.

⁶⁶ See James J. Sheehan, ‘Paradigm Lost? The “*Sonderweg*” Revisited’, in Gunilla Budde *et al.* (eds.), *Transnationale Geschichte. Themen, Tendenzen und Theorien*, Göttingen 2006, pp. 150–160.

⁶⁷ Lamar Cecil, ‘Jew and Junker in Imperial Berlin’, in *LBI Year Book*, vol. 20 (1975), pp. 47–58, here pp. 48 and 58.

⁶⁸ Arthur Prinz, *Juden im Deutschen Wirtschaftsleben. Soziale und wirtschaftliche Struktur im Wandel 1850–1914*, ed. by Avraham Barkai, Tübingen 1984 (Schriftenreihe wissenschaftlicher Abhandlungen des Leo Baeck Instituts 43), p. 64. Prinz had died in 1981.

⁶⁹ William O. McCagg, *Jewish Nobles and Geniuses in Modern Hungary*, Boulder, CO 1972 (East European Monographs 3), p. 17 (and likewise in the 2nd edn. from 1986). His ‘Hungary’s “Feudalized” Bourgeoisie’, in *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 44 (1972), pp. 65–78, also focuses on ennobled Jews.

former Jewish bourgeoisie was even accused of two failures: feudalisation and Germanization (or Magyarization, respectively).

Fritz Stern's biography of Gerson von Bleichröder, published in 1977, has to be seen in the same context. Stern does not understand at all why Bleichröder sought a title of nobility in Bismarck's Germany, which was already seeing increasing antisemitism. For him Bleichröder is but a "patriotic parvenu" on a "hunt for titles", thus symbolising the "anguish of assimilation".⁷⁰ For Stern who, as the son of converts, had to flee from Breslau in 1938, "the quest for what had gone wrong in the German past" has been a decisive "challenge", as he writes in his autobiography.⁷¹ His whole work deals with "the German attack on liberalism".⁷² Coming to his famous book Stern honestly reflects the connections to his own biography:

I don't think I was aware of my 'personal involvement'—and yet, of course, there was a connection between my book in progress on the Jewish banker and the German chancellor... and my own life. The third part of my unfinished book was called 'The Anguish of Assimilation.' But the work was also a tutor to me, and it helped me understand my own world, and deepened concerns that had been there from the start.⁷³

The influence of Stern's book on Bleichröder and Bismarck (recently reprinted in its German translation) cannot be underestimated—for Thomas Nipperdey, for instance, it is the very "best case study" on German-Jewish history of the Imperial era.⁷⁴ Even the rejection of the feudalisation thesis in the 1980s and 1990s did not affect the success of the book.

When looking at Werner Mosse's work, one must bear in mind the accusations against the German bourgeoisie in general and certain Jews in particular. Quite contrary to the trend, he detected a "deliberate adherence to bourgeois values in parts of the Jewish (as well as in parts of the non-Jewish) money and business aristocracy" in 1976.⁷⁵ Many of those who were asked, Mosse says,

refused the 'von', which was accessible or even offered to them, as being unsuitable or indecent and cared little for connections to the court or the aristocracy (except for business purposes at the most). . . . But it was not just the founders of the great Jewish publishing houses who rejected ennoblement, but also the Rathenaus, Carl Fürstenberg, and Ballin and Warburg, patriotic Hanseatic citizens. (Some may have shrunk from the expenses.)⁷⁶

⁷⁰ Stern, *Gold and Iron*, pp. 114 and 11. "The Jew as Patriotic Parvenu" is the title of the seventeenth chapter.

⁷¹ Fritz Stern, *Five Germanys I Have Known*, New York 2006, p. 232.

⁷² *ibid.*, p. 10.

⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 279.

⁷⁴ Nipperdey, p. 853.

⁷⁵ Werner E. Mosse, 'Die Juden in Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft', in *idem* (ed.), *Juden im Wilhelminischen Deutschland 1890–1914*, Tübingen 1976 (Schriftenreihe wissenschaftlicher Abhandlungen des Leo Baeck Instituts 33), pp. 57–113, here p. 85.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 84.

Moreover, for him the reason was not a lack of monarchical supply: "It is interesting that, apparently, ennoblements of Jewish business tycoons were not necessarily linked with the condition of conversion."⁷⁷ Mosse's conclusion is clear:

The conventional view of members of the Jewish upper bourgeoisie in a body (and eventually without success) trying to get access to the leading aristocratic-bourgeois class at all costs due to their wealth and economic positions must be revised.⁷⁸

What followed was the success of Werner Mosse's programmatical demand, supported by Peter Pulzer in the same conference volume who wrote that the Jewish upper bourgeoisie was "flattered with ennoblements and royal tea visits" by William II but kept "distance from the thoughtless consensus of the court".⁷⁹

Of course Werner Mosse's seminal work cannot be examined completely here. Suffice it to notice that he referred to the question of ennoblement more than once. In one highly significant passage from 1985, Mosse strongly criticises "the small group of *Adelsjuden* who had bought their titles by means of conversion and/or cash. There is a world of difference between Fritz Friedländer, who paid a million marks for ennoblement, and Albert Ballin, who refused it when offered *gratis*".⁸⁰ Once more this is the adaption of one of the myths mentioned above: in Ballin's case Mosse simply refers to what James Simon had told Ernst Feder in 1927.⁸¹

To understand the importance of the question of feudalisation for Werner Mosse it is worth remembering that he himself born in Berlin in 1918 and "came from that cultured German-Jewish upper bourgeoisie that rose to prosperity in the course of the nineteenth century"⁸²—and which was to become his main object of research from the 1960s. In his article from 1976 there is one page in which no fewer than three subsequent footnotes mention his great-uncle Rudolf Mosse, who, the historian claims, resisted an attempt by Bismarck to buy his *Berliner Tageblatt*, to have, refused both extreme assimilation and extreme Jewish separatism (being in favour of individual and religious freedom and civil equality)—and refused a title of nobility that William II offered him.⁸³ The only source for all this is his own article on Rudolf Mosse of 1959. Undoubtedly, Werner Mosse had a sincere appreciation of his famous relative, whom he depicted as an ideal German Jew of his times. Thus, like Fritz Stern, Werner Mosse is a good example how "personal involvement" can fundamentally affect historiography.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 86f.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 83.

⁷⁹ Peter Pulzer, 'Die jüdische Beteiligung an der Politik', in Mosse (ed.), *Juden im Wilhelminischen Deutschland 1890–1914*, pp. 143–239, here pp. 238f.

⁸⁰ Werner E. Mosse, 'Wilhelm II and the *Kaiserjuden*: A Problematical Encounter', in Jehuda Reinharz and Walter Schatzberg (eds.), *The Jewish Response to German Culture: From the Enlightenment to the Second World War*, Hanover, NH—London 1985, pp. 164–194, here p. 191.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p. 181.

⁸² Peter Pulzer, Obituary, 'Professor Werner Eugen Mosse, 1918–2001', in Rainer Liedtke and David Rechter (eds.), *Towards Normality? Acculturation and Modern German Jewry*, Tübingen 2003 (Schriftenreihe wissenschaftlicher Abhandlungen des Leo Baeck Instituts 68), pp. v–vii, here p. v.

⁸³ Mosse, 'Die Juden in Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft', p. 84, ns. 94–96.

It was Mosse's intention to rehabilitate the (confessing) Jewish part of the German upper bourgeoisie in particular. Eventually, however, he began to revise the feudalisation thesis in general.⁸⁴ The same approach would become most important for social historians of the so-called Bielefeld School from the 1980s—indeed, a major turn in German historiography. As early as 1972, Hartmut Kaelble stated that ennobled Berlin bankers and entrepreneurs, Jews and non-Jews alike, the hardly ever totally assumed aristocratic habits, mostly continuing their business without any difference.⁸⁵ During the following two decades, convincing criticism of the *Sonderweg* debate and the feudalisation thesis was mostly voiced by British historians with a comparative focus.⁸⁶ But the groundbreaking study that changed all this was a doctoral thesis advised by Hartmut Kaelble of which a shorter version was published in English in 1994: Dolores Augustine's book on the Wilhelmine business elite.⁸⁷ During the last one and a half decades this book has had an enormous influence on how (not only German) historians have come to think about the German upper bourgeoisie at the turn of the century. Hans-Ulrich Wehler, in his *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, as well as many others, refers to Augustine. Modernisation theorists in particular, who by now aimed at rehabilitating the German bourgeoisie, approved of her thesis that monarchical decorations did not mean much to businessmen, their only importance lying in the contacts with leading circles that they facilitated. To put Augustine's thesis in one sentence: "The wealthy business elite of Wilhelmine Germany did not subordinate itself to the aristocracy."⁸⁸

What makes Augustine's book—as well as some articles by her—so important for the historiography of German Jewry is that she portrays Jewish businessmen as particularly self-confident middle-class men. According to her, "autonomous bourgeois features that were present within the Jewish upper bourgeoisie" of Imperial Berlin restricted the attractiveness of titles to the possibility of gaining access to leading circles. Generally, however, Augustine posits a natural aversion to against the old pre-industrialist noble elites and sees the coherence of both Jews and converts strengthened by their shared Jewish "ethnic identity".⁸⁹ From this point of view it is of course self-evident that there were hardly any ennobled entrepreneurs of

⁸⁴ See his 'Adel und Bürgertum im Europa des 19. Jahrhunderts. Eine vergleichende Betrachtung', in Jürgen Kocka and Ute Frevert (eds.), *Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert. Deutschland im europäischen Vergleich*, 3 vols., Munich 1988, vol. 2, pp. 276–314.

⁸⁵ Hartmut Kaelble, *Berliner Unternehmer während der frühen Industrialisierung*, Berlin—New York 1972 (Veröffentlichungen der Historischen Kommission zu Berlin 40), pp. 167–172.

⁸⁶ Cf. David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *Mythen deutscher Geschichtsschreibung. Die gescheiterte bürgerliche Revolution von 1848*, Frankfurt am Main—Berlin—Vienna 1980; and Dominic Lieven, *The Aristocracy in Europe, 1815–1914*, Basingstoke 1992, p. 228 and *passim*.

⁸⁷ Dolores L. Augustine, *Die wilhelminische Wirtschaftselite: Sozialverhalten, Soziales Selbstbewußtsein und Familie*, doctoral thesis (Free University of Berlin), 1991; *idem*, *Patricians and Parvenus: Wealth and High Society in Wilhelmine Germany*, Oxford—Providence, RI 1994.

⁸⁸ *idem*, *Patricians and Parvenus*, p. 254.

⁸⁹ *idem*, 'Die jüdische Wirtschaftselite im wilhelminischen Berlin: Ein jüdisches Patriziat?', in Reinhard Rürup (ed.), *Jüdische Geschichte in Berlin. Essays und Studien*, Berlin 1995, pp. 101–116, here pp. 104 and 114.

Jewish belief. Yet in her thesis she still gives two possible explanations for the lack of ennobled Jews:

Many representatives of the German-Jewish elite, such as Carl Fürstenberg, showed no interest in a title of nobility. One reason might be that bourgeois pride was as strong in the Jewish economic elite as among the wealthy non-Jewish businessmen. Another explanation may be found in the fact that Jews, when they accepted a title of nobility, often had to renounce their religion. In Prussia, conversion to Christianity was usually a requirement for a title of nobility.⁹⁰

What has been forgotten since is Augustine's second hint that Jewish religion was an absolute impediment to ennoblement—not from the point of view of Jews themselves, but for those carrying out the ennobling. Instead, the idea of a proud German business elite indifferent to the decorations the pre-modern Prussian elite had to offer has become most influential. And it is obvious that mostly prominent Jews are mentioned when the question of "bourgeois robustness"⁹¹ in Imperial Germany is discussed. From this perspective, Jews appear to have been even more self-confident than the average bourgeois. Since indeed hardly any Jew was ennobled in Imperial Germany, one might tend to attribute this to a widespread opposition to the monarchy within German Jewry. But the virtual inaccessibility of titles of nobility for confessing Jews is by no means to be interpreted as a refusal of such titles.

The problem may be exemplified by just one recent study. In his thesis on Breslau Jewry, Till van Rahden is strongly influenced by Hans-Ulrich Wehler (and therefore by Dolores Augustine). He states that "monarchical-hierarchical decorations [had] increasingly lost value" in the Imperial era. Hence "the rejection of ennoblement... was widespread both among both Jewish (Carl Fürstenberg, Albert Ballin, and Max Warburg) and non-Jewish (Emil Kirdorf, Krupp, and Thyssen) members of the upper middle class".⁹² Honorary citizenships are characterised by van Rahden as an alternative decoration for proud men of the middle class.⁹³ He argues that, in the Breslau bourgeoisie, the communal title *Ehrenbürger* (honorary citizen) was much respected. He strictly divides:

There was a deep contrast between the communal honorary citizenships, which symbolized the spirit of the bourgeois ethos of achievement, and the governmental system of titles and orders... The [communal] decoration was an alternative to the hierarchical-feudalist system of titles, orders, and ennoblement with which the Prussian state rewarded a monarchical and state-oriented spirit of subjecthood (*Untertanenmentalität*).

⁹⁰ *idem*, *Patricians and Parvenus*, p. 46.

⁹¹ David Blackbourn, *History of Germany, 1780–1918: The Long Nineteenth Century*, 2nd edn., Malden, MS 2003, p. 279. Blackbourn, too, refers to Dolores Augustine.

⁹² Till van Rahden, *Juden und andere Breslauer. Die Beziehungen zwischen Juden, Protestanten und Katholiken in einer deutschen Großstadt von 1860 bis 1925*, Göttingen 2000 (Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft 139), p. 302 with n. 172.

⁹³ *ibid.*, pp. 300–315.

The fact that honorary citizenships were generally held in high esteem hints at a strong opposition to the rapid devaluation of governmental decorations.⁹⁴

But the example van Rahden cites to underline his argument is scarcely convincing. If for the Breslau Jewish merchant Ferdinand Julius Cohn and his wife the document of honorary citizenship which he received in 1897 was “the most valuable treasure”,⁹⁵ this does not allow for the conclusion that they were generally opposed to monarchical decorations. Cohn’s statement should rather be read with the knowledge that certain monarchical titles were inaccessible to Jews in Prussia. What van Rahden does not seem to know is that in 1881 Isaak Cohn, the honorary citizen’s father, applied for an Austrian title of nobility but did not get the necessary permit from the Prussian government. Honorary consul of Austria-Hungary in Breslau and decorated with the Order of the Iron Crown Third Class, he was entitled to apply for the Austrian *Ritterstand*. When the government in Vienna asked the government in Berlin for its consent respecting his ennoblement, the *Heroldamt* clearly decided that “Cohn’s entry into the Austrian *Ritterstand* appears undesirable to us: as we would neither appoint him for ennoblement in Prussia, nor, from our point of view, allow him to use foreign titles in Prussia”.⁹⁶ It can hardly be imagined that Ferdinand Julius Cohn did not know of his father’s unsuccessful attempt to be ennobled.

CONCLUSION

In vehemently accusing the German bourgeoisie of a lack of self-confidence, the once-prevalent feudalisation thesis had taken an extreme position. Later research bears witness to a complete change of perspective, portraying the bourgeoisie—with its indifference towards the monarchy, the old noble elite, and the Prusso-German state run by them—as the vanguard of modernisation. This, however, would have opened up another German *Sonderweg* in Europe, which, until 1917–1918, mainly consisted mainly of monarchies. To presume that bankers, industrialists, and other businessmen were, of necessity, not in favour of social hierarchies, monarchical governments, and symbols deriving from a pre-modern past is altogether unjustified. As is shown by the example of the title *Geheimrat* in nineteenth-century Prussia, “[c]loseness to the state and bourgeois self-confidence seem to have gone together”.⁹⁷ And there is no reason to suppose

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 301 and 315.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 313.

⁹⁶ *Heroldamt* to the minister of the Royal House Count von Schleinitz, Berlin, 20 February 1882. GStA PK, I. HA, Rep. 176, VI C Nr. 54 (not foliated).

⁹⁷ Karin Kaudelka-Hanisch, ‘The titled businessman: Prussian Commercial Councillors in the Rhineland and Westphalia during the nineteenth century’, in David Blackbourn and Richard J. Evans (eds.), *The German Bourgeoisie: Essays on the social history of the German middle class from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century*, London 1991, pp. 87–114, here p. 107.

that there would have been a difference between Jewish and non-Jewish men of the middle class in this respect.

Werner Mosse did succeed: no longer is the German-Jewish upper bourgeoisie accused of having been servile towards the aristocracy while emulating it. Now, paradoxically, the view prevails that several German Jews did not "accept" monarchical and governmental titles, whereas actually they themselves were not fully accepted by the monarchy and government. The problem for the historiography of Jewry, therefore, is that prominent Jewish members of the economic elite of Imperial Germany have been increasingly portrayed in the role of particularly self-confident—or at least "less 'feudalised'",⁹⁸ bourgeois subjects. Bearing in mind the alleged refusals of ennoblement, Gerson von Bleichröder's pursuit of a title of nobility appears even more incomprehensible. As Monika Richarz summarises: "Gerson von Bleichröder . . . was raised to the nobility in 1872 but socially remained an outsider. On the other hand, the younger banker Carl Fürstenberg proudly declined ennoblement".⁹⁹

The picture seems to be more colourful. Not surprisingly, Walther Rathenau foresaw in 1911: "The historian of a later period will be puzzled when he tries to realise how our time with the outer organs of its spirit believed itself to feel democratic, while the desire of its inner soul still tolerated and sought to maintain aristocracy".¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Nipperdey, p. 406.

⁹⁹ Monika Richarz, 'Occupational Distribution and Social Structure', in Michael A. Meyer (ed., with Michael Brenner, assistant ed.), *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, 4 vols., New York 1996–1998, vol. 3 (1997): *Integration in Dispute: 1871–1918*, pp. 35–67, here p. 50.

¹⁰⁰ Walther Rathenau, *Zur Kritik der Zeit* [from 1911, published in 1912], in *idem, Hauptwerke und Gespräche*, ed. by Ernst Schulin, Munich—Heidelberg 1977 (Walther Rathenau-Gesamtausgabe 2), pp. 17–103, here p. 33.